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Ephesians 4:25-32

Christian Virtue Series: Kindness (What Does the World Need Now?)

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Growing up, I recall with fondness my nights spent in high school at football games.

The crisp air of those Fall evenings.

The cheers of the crowd as the running back breaks a tackle and scores a touchdown.

And, when our team wasn't doing so well or there was a dry spot in the game, regardless of the sport being played, whether basketball or football, the cheerleaders would pick up their megaphones, clear their throats and launch into the famously popular, crowd stirring cheer:

We've got spirit, yes we do!

We've got spirit, how 'bout you?

The fans would return the chant back.

Then they would direct their attention to the opposing side's fans and yell out:

We've got spirit, yes we do!

We've got spirit, how 'bout you?

Like a growing tidal force, the cheer would get louder and louder as fans and cheerleaders volleyed these words back and forth – each side hoping their fans would be loudest of all – until life came back into the game.

On the day of Pentecost, when God made the church, there was noise and wind and miracles of speaking and listening – the Spirit could not be contained – as everyone present joined in the cacophonous chorus, *"We've got spirit, yes we do!"*

As Christ followers, we, who call ourselves the church, are familiar with the Holy Spirit.

We know the Holy Spirit to be the 3rd person of the Trinity.

However, can we confidently proclaim, *"We've got spirit, yes we do! – We've got spirit, how 'bout you?"*

Is it safe to say, that often, our robust yells fade into quiet whispers...?

Pentecost helps serve as reminder to us to open our eyes & ears to become more aware & excited about all the places God's Spirit is working – today!!!

Pentecost's mysterious details sometimes keep us from focusing on some of Pentecost's greater meanings...

The reality is the Holy Spirit moved the disciples from sadness to joy / from survival mode to renewed passion and vision / from lifeless existence to new creations!

The reality is the Holy Spirit empowered (and continues to empower) Jesus' followers to be and become who it is God knows them to be – then, now, and tomorrow!

Perhaps, one of the nicest things the Holy Spirit can do for us is named in our Ephesians passage,

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do

not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. (4:29-32)

Be. Ye. Kind.

Our family for years had those three words on a poster in the doorway to our home, so that upon entry and exit the words we would see were, “Be. Ye. Kind.”

Solid words to live by!

Rev. Wright texted me this week a bumper sticker he saw, it reads, “Be kinder than necessary.”

Rev. Wright also shared an article he found printed in the Gettysburg Times written by Gail Rosenblum of the Star Tribune (Minneapolis), it was titled, “Fifth-graders combat bullying by adding kindness to the curriculum,” perhaps you saw it as well.

Following the lead of their fifth-grade teacher, Matt Greenhoe, who noted no “major problems” among his students as they interact with one another, however, he did say, “But we could use a little more kindness in our school.”

About a dozen of his fifth graders at Parker Elementary School founded what they call the “Kindness Club.”

Every Tuesday they give up recess to gather in the school social worker’s office to plan events and kindness challenges.

A key driver in the club, Ady Bollinger, quotes the club’s mission,

This club’s purpose is to stop bullying and improve self-esteem!

Most of all, it is to spread kindness to the school!

The Kindness Club placed a poster in the school which read, “Bullies not allowed in our house.” They place affirmation stickers on student lockers.

Sometimes the kindness is as simple as giving attention to a kindergartener crying in the hall. 11-year-old member Elsie Ostmoe said, “It just feels good helping kids. Sometimes, it’s hard for a kid to go to an adult. It’s easier to go to a kid your age.”

Highlighting the positive impact of these students’ everyday efforts, Greenhoe said, “Other kids are seeing that being kind is cool. It’s having a ripple effect. I really have seen a change in attitudes.”

This follows what organizations like ‘Random Acts of Kindness [dot] org’ have been positing – namely kindness is teachable.

Dr. Ritchie Davidson from the University of Wisconsin, writes, “It’s like weight training, we found that people can actually build up their compassion ‘muscle’ and respond to others’ suffering with care and a desire to help.”

Kindness is also contagious, as those fifth graders at Parker Elementary School showed, the positive effects of kindness are experienced in the brain of everyone who witnesses the act. It improves their mood and makes them significantly more likely to “pay it forward.” This means one good deed in a crowded area can create a domino effect and improve the day of dozens of people!

Kindness is life-changing! Happiness researcher, Sean Achor, demonstrated through extensive research that if you perform random acts of kindness for two minutes a day for twenty-one days, you can retrain your brain to be more positive. Studies show when your brain is more positive you are more likely to be creative, intelligent and productive. These attributes can become what we call ‘quality of life’ attributes: job success / wealth / healthy relationships / and better health.

According to Random Acts of Kindness [dot] org,
Kindness increases:

- “The love hormone” – oxytocin – witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin – which in turn aids in lowering blood pressure and improving overall heart-health – oxytocin can also increase self-esteem and optimism.
- Energy – Christine Carter, UC Berkeley, Greater Good Science Center, stated that about half of participants in a study reported, “they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others; many also reported feeling calmer and less depressed, with increased feelings of self-worth.”
- Lifespan – Christine Carter in her book, “Raising Happiness; In Pursuit of Joyful Kids and Happier Parents” indicates, “People who volunteer tend to experience fewer aches and pains. People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organizations have an impressive 44% lower likelihood of dying early, and that’s after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, gender, habits like smoking, marital status and many more. This,” according to Carter, “is a stronger effect than exercising four times a week or going to church.” [Now, I’ll add here for the health care professionals and ministry team – I am not advocating you give up the gym or your pew – I’m advocating you add kindness to your weekly body and spiritual exercise routine – which means you just might live well into your 100s.]

Kindness decreases:

- Pain – engaging in acts of kindness produces endorphins, the brains natural painkiller!
- Stress – perpetually kind people have 23% less cortisol (the stress hormone) and age slower than the average population!
- Anxiety – in a University of British Columbia Study, a group of highly anxious individuals performed at least six acts of kindness a week. After one month, there was a significant increase in positive moods, relationship satisfaction and a decrease in social avoidance in socially anxious individuals.

People underestimate the impact of a simple act of Kindness.

It is truly one of the most meaningful, fulfilling and world changing life-skills. Kindness is both selfless and selfish - because you benefit as well – so go on and be selfish by being kind.

Kindness is contagious like a disease in which the outcome is divinely beautiful. Jamil Zaki, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University and Director of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab conducted a series of studies to observe how witnessing acts of kindness inspires kindness, causing it to spread like a virus. Zaki concludes that “by emphasizing empathy-positive norms, we may be able to leverage the power of social influence to combat apathy and conflict in new ways.”

How did our Ephesians passage put it,

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. (4:25-28)

The Dalai Lama has been quoted as saying, “Be Kind Whenever Possible. It is always possible.”

One week ago, this past Friday, our son, along with many other children, graduated from high school. Like many families, we celebrated the excitement and proud moments in the waning week of high school. Award ceremonies, baccalaureate worship, commencement, family members visits. This past week has prompted many a stroll down an 18-year-old memory lane.

We’ve reflected on school days and activities throughout the years and wondered how quickly time passed – in the almost blink of an eye we went from first day of school photos by the back fence marching off to school singing Wiggles songs in the car to watching a young adult marching down the high school auditorium aisle with classmates to Sir Edward Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1.

At commencement we were reminded of Gettysburg High School’s mission. Their principal, Mr. Lusk, along with the dedicated faculty, teachers, and staff worked to create a climate, a culture around three simple two-word phrases, which they call “The Warrior Way.”

The three phrases are:

Be Here.

Be Involved.

Be Committed.

Around January 2019 they added as fourth aspect to “The Warrior Way.” As best I can recall, it came about in response to the story of Rachel Scott, the first victim in the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Rachel’s father visited the school and talked about Rachel’s Challenge which seeks to inspire everyone to replace acts of violence, bullying, and negativity with acts of **respect, kindness, and compassion.**

The fourth aspect Mr. Lusk and his team added to “The Warrior Way” was: Be Kind.

Be Here.
Be Kind.
Be Involved.
Be Committed.

As our family reflected on the last eighteen years, we recalled the morning ritual as we headed out the door toward school, Candace would recite to Alex, the following, hoping it would download into the fabric of his life:

“Don’t forget...be courteous, be courageous, and be kind.

What’s the greatest commandment, ‘Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

Now, the funny thing is, as Candace recited this phrase to me on the back porch, I began to recite aloud with her...be courageous, be kind...

All this time, I thought it was for him, and here it downloaded into my psyche as well.

Be Courteous.
Be Courageous.
Be Kind.

Be Here.
Be Kind.
Be Involved.
Be Committed.

Love God.
Love Neighbor.
Love self.

Be.
Ye.
Kind.

For every act of kindness creates a ripple effect that goes on with no end in sight.

Let’s outdo one another in being kind – now that’s something the world needs now and always!

Amen and Amen.¹

¹ Works cited: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-power-of-kindness_b_12772034 ;
<https://thinkkindness.org/the-scientific-impact-of-kindness/> ; https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-power-of-kindness_n_8106510 ; <https://www.dartmouth.edu/wellness/emotional/rakhealthfacts.pdf>